

Parenting Together

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Children's Social & Emotional Development

THE FIRST YEARS LAST A LIFETIME

Children's experiences in their earliest years affect how their brains develop, the way they respond to stress, and their ability to form trusting relationships. During these years the brain undergoes its most dramatic growth, setting the stage for social and emotional development. Language blossoms, basic motor abilities form, thinking becomes more complex, and children begin to understand their own feelings and those of others.

Loving relationships give young children a sense of comfort, safety, confidence, and encouragement. They teach young children how to form friendships, communicate emotions, and to deal with challenges. Strong, positive relationships also help children develop trust, empathy, compassion, and a sense of right and wrong.



Birth to 12 Months

Starting from birth, babies are learning who they are by how they are treated. Through everyday interactions, parents, relatives and caregivers send babies messages like: You're clever. You're good at figuring things out. You're loved. You make me laugh. I enjoy being with you. These messages shape a baby's self-esteem.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Provide babies with responsive care by learning their likes, dislikes, cues, sounds, etc.
- Support babies' developing skills through making eye contact, play, and exploring.
- Be affectionate and nurturing. Touch, kiss, hold, rock, read, & sing!
- Help your child feel safe and secure by being responsive and soothing.

12-24 Months

Young toddlers are starting to develop a sense of self-awareness—that they are separate and independent from others. This new knowledge helps them understand that other people have thoughts and feelings that may be different from their own. Realizing this helps children begin to develop empathy—the ability to put one's self in another person's shoes and imagine what she is feeling.

Young toddlers are also becoming more and more interested in their peers, though at this age they usually play next to or nearby other children rather than with them. Children will begin to play more interactively with peers as they near age 3 and beyond.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Support young toddlers' developing skills by letting them play, explore, and follow their interests
- Help children learn to resolve conflict in healthy, appropriate ways. Show them how to share, play turn-taking games, and practice distracting or redirecting your child to reduce or avoid conflicts
- Help your child feel safe and secure. Be their safe "home base" that they can look to as they begin to walk and explore the world. Establishing routines is also key to helping toddlers feel safe, confident, and in control of their world.

The Book Nook

On Monday when it Rained
By Cheryl Kachenmeister

Asi me siento yo/The Way I Feel
By Janan Cain

The Color Monster: A Story about Emotions (Eng. & Span. eds.)
By Anna Llenas

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24-36 Months

As two-year-olds, children begin to play interactively with their peers more often. You may see a real explosion in pretend play, a critical aspect of children's development. Pretend play builds language, thinking, and social skills when children take on pretend roles and develop their own ideas and stories.

Two-year-olds are also starting to show empathy—understanding the feelings of others. You might see a child comfort a friend who is hurt or even cry when he sees another child who is upset. At the same time, toddlers still love to say “No!” and need support resolving conflicts that arise. Children develop more advanced social play skills, such as sharing and turn-taking, over time as they near age 3 and beyond.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Help your older toddler understand her feelings. Use both words and play to help them learn and practice understanding and describing their emotions.
- Encourage early friendships. Playing together with other children gives the opportunity to practice important skills like sharing, taking turns, resolving conflicts. This also allows them to experience the joy of friendship.
- Support older toddlers' developing skills. Let them take the lead in deciding what to play, empathize with their frustrations, offer your observations, provide support, praise the process (not just the result), use language to describe feels and experiences, and (especially as they near age 3) explain your reasons for requests & limits.



For your local parenting resources visit us at:

orparenting.org

References

- What Do We Know About Social and Emotional Development in Early Childhood?
<http://www.urbanchildinstitute.org/resources/publications/good-start/social-and-emotional-development>
- Developing Social-Emotional Skills
<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/developing-social-emotional-skills>
- What is Social & Emotional Development?
<https://dmh.mo.gov/healthykids/parents/social-emotional-development.html>